



Frank Uekoetter. *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xv + 230 pp. \$23.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-61277-7.

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“More Brown than Green”

Environmental historians are no strangers to controversy. In the last twenty-five years numerous scholars have studied the history of environmental protection in Nazi Germany, a provocative topic if there ever was one. Braving criticism for seeming to draw parallels between modern “green” parties and one of the most brutal regimes in history, historians have explored such things as the protection of natural areas, forestry, air pollution laws, and the Nazis’ highway construction program. The most sophisticated scholarship appears in recent anthologies and monographs, and focuses primarily upon the conservation movement (also called the nature protection or *Naturschutz* movement). Contributors to these latest works argue that, although there were troubling ideological and personal connections between the *Naturschutz* movement and the Third Reich, these relationships do not suggest that modern environmentalists have fascist leanings. Moreover, the Nazis often failed to implement highly touted measures like the Imperial Nature Protection Law or ecologically sensitive forestry practices; their commitment to “green” ideas was far less important than industrialization and war.[1]

In *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany*, Frank Uekoetter demonstrates, nonetheless, why a study of nature protection in the Third Reich remains vital. Drawing upon a variety of national, provincial, and city archives, he shows that nature protectionists were opportunists, attracted mainly to the Nazi regime because it seemed to offer more systematic preservation of natural areas. The author also maintains

that such opportunism was a “slippery slope” that discouraged conservationists from reflecting on the moral implications of their cooperation with the Nazis. Reinforced by a logical structure, meticulous research, and revealing examples, Uekoetter’s argument also serves as a warning to modern environmentalists, who may be determined to pursue their own agenda without careful reflection.

The author is well qualified to explore the environmental history of Nazi Germany. A research fellow at the Forschungsinstitut des Deutschen Museums, Uekoetter has published extensively on topics ranging from conservation to air pollution policies, and he co-edited *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus*, a collection of essays from the Fachkongress, “Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus” in 2002. Sponsored by German minister for the environment JÃ¼rgen Trittin, this conference brought together government and academic experts for the first time, and broadened awareness of this subject beyond a relatively narrow, specialist readership. Uekoetter’s well-organized monograph should continue to expand interest in this topic. Constructing his argument on a logical foundation, Uekoetter starts with a useful “Note on Vocabulary,” and then follows with three short chapters that explore the importance of this topic, the ideas shared by conservationists and Nazis, and the institutional connections between the *Naturschutz* movement and the regime. Some readers may find that his analysis of ideological connections between Nazis and nature protectionists repeats arguments from the

early and mid-1990s by Michael Wettengel, Karl Ditt, and others. Yet Uekoetter references more recent work by Thomas Lekan and Friedemann Schmoll which discredits the notion that nationalistic, right-wing ideas within the conservation movement put them on a direct path to National Socialism.[2] Instead, as he argues in chapter 3, institutions were the glue binding nature protectionists to the regime. In chapters 4 and 5 he proves this point, for the most part, by exploring a series of four notable *Naturschutz* campaigns. Chapters 6 and 7 consider the legacy of Nazi environmentalism on the conservation movement and on the land itself, while chapter 8 is a conclusion. This structure, flowing from basic issues and arguments to a series of notable case studies, makes the book accessible to academic readers unfamiliar with the topic and to an English-language audience. A short bibliographic essay and a series of well-chosen photographs and illustrations do the same.

The main strength of this book, however, is the author's skillful use of archival sources to illustrate the inconsistent attitude toward conservation displayed by the Nazi regime, and the opportunism exhibited by conservationists. Uekoetter has wisely chosen four prominent but very different cases to illustrate his point. These include the campaign to limit mining on the Hohenstoffeln Mountain in Baden, the expansion of Hermann Goering's Schorfheide Reserve near Berlin, the regulation of the Ems River in Westphalia, and the protest against a hydroelectric project in the Wutach Gorge. Uekoetter draws several lessons from these disparate campaigns. Above all, Nazi leaders showed no consistent attitude toward the preservation of nature. From the highest level, Adolf Hitler displayed little or no concern for conservation, while interest was only marginally higher among the second tier of Nazi chieftans. Hermann Goering, for instance, promoted the Imperial Nature Protection Law of 1935 because it enhanced his prestige, and his intense interest in the Schorfheide stemmed more from his obsession with hunting than any other factor. Heinrich Himmler demonstrated a similar lack of enthusiasm for nature protection, intervening to protect the Hohenstoffeln Mountain only because it was associated with a medieval castle.

Faced with this indifference, rank-and-file conservationists were highly determined and opportunistic. In the case of the Hohenstoffeln, the novelist Ludwig Finckh campaigned obsessively in the 1930s to prevent mining on the crest of this scenic mountain top. Drawing upon the personal papers of Ludwig Finckh in the Baden State Archives, memoranda from the Berlin Document Center,

and other regional sources, Uekoetter shows that Finckh was both a right-wing anti-Semite, and a man willing to pull any strings to further his cause. Collaborating with another author, Finckh argued in 1934 that it would be an "absurdity" to destroy such a famous mountain in an era characterized by respect for "blood, and soil and race" (quoted, p. 91). Yet Finckh's campaign floundered when it spilled into the public. Referring to a 1934 speech by Finckh, Baden's Prime Minister stated, "This extraordinary activism of Dr. Finckh is at odds with our official line of reasoning which refuses any kind of agitation in the general public" (p. 93). Apparently it was acceptable for Finckh to lobby behind the scenes, but a threat to the state when he campaigned openly. In the end, Finckh and his supporters persuaded SS Chief Heinrich Himmler—through back channels—to halt mining on the mountain. Uekoetter uses correspondence in the files of the Reich Conservation Agency to demonstrate that such opportunism had a price. Even after World War II, the former chief of this agency, Hans Klose, conceded that it was a "very clever move" to use Himmler "as an instrument for a good cause" (p. 98). No dedicated National Socialist, Klose seemed unaware of the moral implications of cooperating with the architect of the Final Solution.

Other archival sources reveal a similar combination of frustration, cynicism, and determination on the part of conservationists. Forced to work with the state, leaders of the nature protection movement adopted a flexible, if fatalistic approach to major preservation campaigns. In the case of the Ems River, Uekoetter scrutinizes correspondence between the local and provincial leaders in Westphalia to show how conservationists sometimes adopted extremist rhetoric while in other cases they appealed more romantically to "the landscape's peculiar scenic beauty" (p. 116). In any event, government officials insisted that conservationists voice their protest behind closed doors, in accordance with the Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935 (RNG). Consequently, Germany's nature protection movement was forced to take what it could get, even after having demonstrated its loyalty to Hitler and the regime.

Above all, it was the sense of opportunism that bound nature protectionists to the state, according to Uekoetter. Scholars might disagree with Uekoetter's assertion that, "compared with other, more aggressive groups, the rightist tendencies within the conservation movement were weak" (p. 27), but they cannot deny that legislation like the RNG encouraged the conservationists to think that the Nazis were serious about *Naturschutz*. Uekoetter's chapter, "On the Paper Trail, the Everyday Business of

Conservation,” makes it clear that the RNG gave new legal tools to the conservation movement and encouraged them to engage in a frenzy of bureaucratic work. Here the author scours government files from Westphalia, Düsseldorf, and Bielefeld to show that “Once again, the national conservation law defined an important watershed, and administrative files grew notably in volume after 1935” (p. 138). Among other things, paragraph 20 required government officials to consult with nature protection advisors prior to major construction projects, while paragraph 24 excluded indemnity for actions taken to carry out the law. In particular, many rank-and-file conservationists saw paragraph 24 as a practical tool to protect the countryside, and not as a symbol of the Nazis’ dedication to a mystical *Volksgemeinschaft*, where collective rights prevailed over those of the individual. While this conclusion is not fully satisfying—after all, some leaders of the nature protection did praise this law as the expression of Nazi ideology—the archival sources reveal that most conservationists experienced the RNG in the reams of correspondence, decrees, and attempts to create small protected areas.

In the end, the RNG probably created more paper work than tangible achievements on the ground. Uekoetter wisely refrains from any sweeping conclusions about how many new preserves were created or whether the Nazis’ conservation policies were good for the environment. The best that can be said, according to Uekoetter, is that Nazi-era conservationists were able to prevent the worst effects of rapid industrialization and the transformation of entire landscapes through swamp drainage projects, new highway construction, and other schemes. In this sense, the Nazi regime was typical of other nations in the industrial world, modernizing its economy, transforming its landscape, clogging its rivers and skies with pollution. While Germany’s commitment to conservation was probably more serious than in other industrialized nations, this by no means suggests that Nazi Germany was a “green” state.

In the end, Dr. Uekoetter must be given credit for writing an accessible and revealing work on a provocative topic. Writing in a clear, unadorned manner, he notes in the end that, while reverence for nature could coexist with extremist, right-wing slogans, “it would be

short-sighted to focus on ideological issues only” (p. 207). After all, it was a “tactical rapprochement” that drew conservationists to the Nazis (p. 208). It was a rapprochement that the German *Naturschutz* movement refused to discuss in the years after World War II, and an alliance that modern environmentalists ignore at their own peril.

Notes

[1]. Some basic works in this field include Karl Ditt, “Naturschutz zwischen Zivilisationskritik, Tourismusförderung und Umweltschutz: USA, England und Deutschland 1860-1970,” in *Politische Zäsuren und gesellschaftlicher Wandel im 20. Jahrhundert. Regionale und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Matthias Frese and Michael Prinz (Paderborn: Westfälisches Institut für Regionalgeschichte, Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 1996); Raymond H. Dominick III, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871-1971* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Die Liebe zur Landschaft. Teil III: Der Drang nach Osten. Zur Entwicklung der Landespflege im Nationalsozialismus und während des Zweiten Weltkrieg in den ‘eingegliederten Ostgebieten’* (Munich: Minerva, 1987); Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Wettengel, “Staat und Naturschutz 1906-1945: Zur Geschichte der Staatlichen Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege in Preußen und der Reichsstelle für Naturschutz,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 257 (1993); Thomas Zeller, *Straße, Bahn, Panorama: Verkehrswege und Landschaftseränderung in Deutschland von 1930 bis 1990* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2002); Franz-Josef Brüeggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, eds., *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005); Joachim Radkau and Frank Uekoetter, eds., *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2003).

[2]. Friedemann Schmoll, *Erinnerung an die Natur. Die Geschichte des Naturschutzes im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2004); Lekan, *Imagining the Nation*.

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